

Census forms not showing up in some places in Minnesota

by [Bob Kelleher](#), Minnesota Public Radio

April 1, 2010

St. Paul, Minn. — Today is National Census Day and Minnesotans are ahead of the rest of the nation in returning census forms. But in some parts of the state residents never received the forms at all.

In Northeast Minnesota, Cook County recorded just a 35 percent return rate in the last census in 2000; and they're just behind that so far this year.

Some residents accuse the Census Bureau of not working hard enough to get the forms to rural households, but census officials are downplaying the concerns.

In St. Paul, Human Rights official Luz Maria Frias says the count is going well, but there are residences that apparently got no forms. "What we've seen is large apartment buildings that may have been missed, Frias said. "And that currently is what we've seen as somewhat of a pattern."

As of April 1, St. Paul had returned just 54 percent of census forms. But that's much better than the nation as a whole, and some remote Minnesota counties.

Clarissa Spicer is one of the Minnesotans who says she never received the census form.

She's a forester with the Department of Natural Resources and works and lives near Baudette, at the top of the state in Lake of the Woods County.

"No I did not, and none of my friends or co-workers in Baudette got forms either," Spicer said.

It's apparently a common problem there.

"I know of at least probably a dozen," Spicer said. "And, it's my understanding that no body in Baudette got a form in the mail."

Not getting the forms can certainly delay the public's response.

According to the Census Bureau only about one in every four residents of Lake of the Woods county are returning forms. That's half the national rate of 52 percent.

The return rate for Minnesota is higher than the nation at 62 percent. But Aitkin County has only returned 36 percent; Cook County has a 34 percent return rate.

"Cook County has been a challenge, both in the last census as well, as it continues to be in this census," said Roberta , who directs the census count in 11 northern minnesota counties from Duluth.

Thorsvik said census regulations require that forms have to go to actual residences; they don't allow forms to go to post office boxes.

But many residents in Cook county have their regular mail delived to P.O. boxes so census teams have been working up and down the rural roads leaving forms at each of those homes, Thorsvik said.

Typically, a non-response gets another personal visit beginning in May, but Thorsvik says in Cook County they're starting face to face visits early.

"Because of the low response rates in the previous census, we are going door to door and enumerating directly with the residents. And that's currently taking place. It will continue for about the next six to eight weeks," she said.

But there's something else than can skew the return numbers in a place like Cook County: Many of the homes are seasonal; often summer lake homes.

There's simply no one there April 1st, so the total response looks a lot lower than it really is.

And there's an issue about just how the returns are counted. According to Samantha O'Neil, with the Census in Washington D.C., the percentage of returns posted on their website reflects the percentage of returns for forms they mailed. It does not include people contacted in door to door enumeration; at least not yet.

So an extremely low return rate like in Cook or Lake of the Woods County, may not reflect reality.

And, O'Neil says, people should give the process more time.

"We're asking people not to be concerned if they have not received a form until April 12th," O'Neil said.

She said some forms are still coming in the mail; and there's a new effort this week to reach some areas.

"We did mail out replacement forms to some of our areas in the country that are lower responding, so you might get a second form in the mail if you have not yet returned yours," O'Neil said.

And the stakes are big for Minnesota--the state faces the potential loss of a congressional seat. But that's not all.

According to the Census Bureau, the count helps determine how \$400 billion gets distributed through 170 federal programs.

For every 100 residents missed a city could lose out on one million dollars in aid over the next ten years.

If you haven't gotten that form by April 12th; get one at a local library, or contact the [Census website](#).

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